

Mission
and
Evangelism:
An
Ecumenical
Affirmation

A Study Guide
for Congregations

MISSION AND EVANGELISM: AN ECUMENICAL AFFIRMATION

A STUDY GUIDE FOR CONGREGATIONS

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Table of Contents

Suggestions for Study	1
Background	3
Mission and Evangelism:	
An Ecumenical Affirmation	5
Preface	5
The Call to Mission	9
The Call to Proclamation and Witness	12
Ecumenical Convictions	17
Conversion	18
The Gospel to all Realms of Life	22
The Church and its Unity in God's Mission	26
Mission in Christ's Way	32
Good News to the Poor	36
Mission in and to Six Continents	42
Witness among People of Living Faiths	47
Looking Toward the Future	50
Appendices	52
Cases for Study	57
1. Proclaiming the Kingdom of God	58
2. The Cross...Uncovers the Lostness of the World ...	59
3. Communicating the Gospel	61
4. An Encounter with God	62
5. The Gospel to All Realms of Life	64
6. The Eucharist – Missionary Medium	66
7. The Living Witness of a True Community	68
8. Rediscovering the Cross	70
9. Crusading Mind or Crucified Mind?	74
10. Jesus Means What He Says... ..	75
11. "If Anyone Would Come After Me..."	76
12. The Missionary Frontier at the Parish Doorstep	79
13. An Encounter of Commitments	81
Suggested Bibliography	83

SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY

What does God call us to be and do?

What is God's message for today?

How should we express God's message?

How does God's love require us to respond to our world?

The purpose of this study is to encourage Christians, individually and in groups, to confront these important questions and to examine their calling in their particular situations as members of Christ's Church worldwide.

Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation does not provide a simple definition of mission. It contains much material for study and discussion. This edition of the affirmation includes exercises for individual and group reflection.

The study material may be used in various ways, depending on the nature of the group and the time available. Two alternative approaches are suggested here:

1. If the participants come to each session without prior preparation, read through a section together out loud, taking turns, then discuss the questions based on that section.
2. If the participants are willing to do homework, assign one or more sections for each meeting; bring written answers to the questions; use these answers as the basis for discussion.

Little or no introduction is needed for the document; spend the time discussing the questions and pressing each other toward consensus and application. The critical step is to get an initial response from all the participants. Once they start responding, it is relatively easy to build the discussion around the group's concerns and experiences.

Additional resources are provided in the cases for study. Though the cases are introduced by specific references to the affirmation text, they invite a wider discussion which will encourage partici-

pants to bring together the various dimensions of mission and evangelism. Individuals and groups might be encouraged to write their own experiences and/or to find stories which are particularly relevant to their own situation.

It is very likely that individual participants, groups and the congregation(s) they represent will want to formulate some conclusions at the end of the study and/or to consider new approaches to mission/evangelism. Groups may wish to share the process with a local congregation by presenting a sample session as an informal drama or by planning worship experiences which incorporate ideas and experiences shared in the discussions.

Background

In 1976, immediately after the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Nairobi, the Central Committee of the World Council asked the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) to prepare a document containing the basic convictions of the ecumenical movement on the topic of mission and evangelism. The Central Committee itself began to work in that direction by preparing in 1976 a letter to the churches, calling their attention to the confessing character of every local community (see *Ecumenical Review*, Oct. 1977). During the preparation of the world mission conference held in Melbourne in 1980 on the theme "Your Kingdom Come", CWME engaged in a long and fruitful conversation with churches of all confessions and regions, assessing the priorities for our missionary obedience today.

In 1981, the Central Committee received this document, "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation", for a first reading; in July 1982, this affirmation was approved by the Central Committee and sent to the churches for their consideration, inspiration and implementation.

The document summarizes some central points which have been learned in the thinking and doing of mission and evangelism in the member churches of the World Council of Churches. The WCC is in a privileged position for this task because it is the meeting place of the Orthodox and Protestant Churches. In addition, a serious and very constructive Roman Catholic participation is a normal feature of CWME's life (see *International Review of Mission*, Oct. 1982).

As usual with ecumenical documents, the authority of the document depends on its content and is not binding for any one of the member churches; most of the churches have had an opportunity to contribute to the formulation of this document and will recognize themselves in many of the pages. In the Protestant family, people of different theological persuasions and not merely different denominations have been consulted and have participated in meetings in order to help prepare this affirmation.

Mission and evangelism is not the monopoly of CWME within the World Council of Churches; all programs of the World Council intend to fulfil the mission entrusted by God to the Church, and our search for Christian unity pursues very clearly the goal for which Jesus prayed, "that all may believe". It is the particular

responsibility of CWME, however, to follow the theological discussions concerning the shape and content of our mission today, and especially to facilitate the conversations, collaboration and support of the churches as they endeavour to go into all the world to make disciples of the nations. We hope this document makes explicit the underlying convictions of the life of the World Council of Churches and is helpful to the member churches as an outline for curricula on mission and evangelism.

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Commission on World Mission and Evangelism
World Council of Churches

Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation*

PREFACE

The biblical promise of a new earth and a new heaven where love, peace and justice will prevail (Ps. 85:7-13; Isa. 32:17-18, 65:17-25 and Rev. 21:1-2) invites our actions as Christians in history. The contrast of that vision with the reality of today reveals the monstrosity of human sin, the evil unleashed by the rejection of God's liberating will for humankind. Sin, alienating persons from God, neighbour and nature, is found both in individual and corporate forms, both in slavery of the human will and in social, political and economic structures of domination and dependence.

The Church is sent into the world to call people and nations to repentance, to announce forgiveness of sin and a new beginning in relations with God and with neighbours through Jesus Christ. This evangelistic calling has a new urgency today.

In a world where the number of people who have no opportunity to know the story of Jesus is growing steadily, *how necessary it is to multiply the witnessing vocation of the church!*

In a world where the majority of those who do not know Jesus are the poor of the earth, those to whom he promised the kingdom of God, *how essential it is to share with them the Good News of that kingdom!*

In a world where people are struggling for justice, freedom and liberation, often without the realisation of their hopes, *how important it is to announce that God's kingdom is promised to them!*

In a world where the marginalised and the drop-outs of affluent society search desperately for comfort and identity in drugs or esoteric cults, *how imperative it is to announce that he has come so that all may have life and may have it in all its fullness (John 10:10)!*

In a world where so many find little meaning, except in the relative security of their affluence, *how necessary it is to hear once again Jesus' invitation to discipleship, service and risk!*

In a world where so many Christians are nominal in their commitment to Jesus Christ, *how necessary it is to call them again to the fervour of their first love!*

In a world where wars and rumours of war jeopardise the present and future of humankind, where an enormous part of natural resources and people are consumed in the arms race, *how crucial it is to call the peacemakers blessed, convinced that God in Christ has broken all barriers and has reconciled the world to himself (Eph. 2:14; II Cor. 5:19)!*

This ecumenical affirmation is a challenge which the churches extend to each other to announce that God reigns, and that there is hope for a future when God will “unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:10). Jesus is “the first and the last, and the Living One” (Rev. 1:17-18), who “is coming soon” (Rev. 22:12), who “makes all things new” (Rev. 21:5).

*In this edition of the affirmation text, some changes have been made in the direction of inclusive language. The edition retains, however, the integrity of quotations and the Revised Standard Version Scripture texts; it also retains the use of the “Father” image of God. Perhaps individuals and groups will want to consider the way in which language itself is an issue in mission. (“Cases for Study #3” raises this question.)

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Make a contrast between the biblical vision for our world (as suggested in the biblical references given) and the real world as we know it. List the characteristics of each in parallel columns.

The biblical vision	The real world

Discuss these contrasting pictures and explore steps from one to the other. (This whole study is intended to help find ways to bridge this gap.)

2. Explain what sin is in its individual and corporate forms. Give examples of each.

Individual sin	Corporate sin

After filling these boxes, discuss the relationships between individual and corporate sin.

3. Underline the seven situations or groups of people, listed in paragraphs 3 - 9 of the Preface, to whom the Good News should be proclaimed. Consider why these are mentioned. List the situations or groups of people in your community or city who especially need to hear the message of Jesus Christ.

Discuss *whether* that message is being given. Then begin to consider *how* and *by whom* it might be expressed more effectively.

THE CALL TO MISSION

1. The present ecumenical movement came into being out of the conviction of the churches that the division of Christians is a scandal and an impediment to the witness of the Church. **There is a growing awareness among the churches today of the inextricable relationship between Christian unity and missionary calling, between ecumenism and evangelisation. “Evangelisation is the test of our ecumenical vocation”.¹**

As “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, according to the Scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit”,² the rallying point of the World Council of Churches is the common confession of Jesus Christ. The saving ministry of the Son is understood within the action of the Holy Trinity; it was the Father who in the power of the Spirit sent Jesus Christ the Son of God incarnate, the Saviour of the whole world. The churches of the WCC are on a pilgrimage towards unity under the missionary vision of *John 17:21*, “that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou has sent me”.³

2. Already in the Old Testament the people of Israel were looking forward to the day of peace where God’s justice will prevail (*Isa. 11:1-9*). Jesus came into that tradition announcing that the kingdom of God was at hand (*Mark 1:15*), that in him the reality of the kingdom was present (*Luke 4:15-21*). God was offering this new justice to the children, to the poor, to all who labour and are heavy laden, to all those who will repent and will follow Jesus. The early Church confessed Jesus as Lord, as the highest authority at whose name every knee shall bow, who in the cross and in the resurrection has liberated in this world the power of sacrificial love.

3. Christ sent the disciples with the words: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (*John 20:21*). The disciples of Jesus were personal witnesses of the risen Christ (*I John 1:2-3*). As such they were sent – commissioned apostles – to the world. **Based on their testimony which is preserved in the New Testament and in the life of the Church, the Church has as one constitutive mark its being apostolic, its being sent into the world (Appendix 1). God in**

Christ has equipped the Church with all gifts of the Spirit necessary for its witness. "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts. 1:8).

4. The book of *Acts* tells the story of the expansion of the early Church as it fulfils its missionary vocation. The Holy Spirit came upon that small Jerusalem community on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-39), in order that through them and through others who were to believe in Christ through their word (John 17:20), the world may be healed and redeemed.

The early Church witnessed to its Risen Lord in a variety of ways, most specially in the style of life of its members. "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2: 46-47) (Appendix 2). Through the persecutions suffered by the early Christians, the word spread spontaneously: "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The apostles then came to confirm the faith of those who had accepted the Word of God (Acts 8:14-17). At other times, the word spread through more explicit and purposeful ministries. The church in Antioch organized the first missionary trip. Barnabas and Paul were sent by the church in response to the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-4). Time and time again, the Church was surprised by God's calling to face entirely new missionary situations (Acts 8:26; 10:17; 16: 9-10).

5. Jesus Christ was in himself the complete revelation of God's love, manifested in justice and forgiveness through all aspects of his earthly life. He completed the work of the Father. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). In his obedience to the Father's will, in his love for humanity, he used many ways to reveal God's love to the world: forgiving, healing, casting out demons, teaching, proclaiming, denouncing, testifying in courts, finally surrendering his life. The Church today has the same freedom to develop its mission, to respond to changing situations and circumstances (Appendix 3). It is sent into the world, participating in that flow of love from God the Father. In that mission of love (Matt. 22:37) through all aspects of its life, the Church endeavours to witness to the full

realisation of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ. The Church is called, like John the Baptist, to point towards the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

- 1 Philip Potter's speech to the Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops, Rome 1974.
- 2 Constitution of the World Council of Churches.
- 3 Constitution of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Go through this section carefully and underline all the words that might be considered synonyms for "mission". Then list those words here; place an "x" beside the ones you can explain; place a question mark beside the ones you would rather ask others to explain.

Consider as a group the various meanings these words convey in your context and the feelings you have about them.

2. Explain why *unity* is important for *mission* by giving two examples of disunity that hinder the church's witness in your situation.

a. _____

b. _____

3. List the various dimensions of the early church's mission:

4. Explain in your own words the common source and motivation for mission.

Consider how this motivation is essential for the *Christian* response to the seven groups you underlined in paragraphs 3 - 9 of the Preface.

THE CALL TO PROCLAMATION AND WITNESS

6. The mission of the Church ensues from the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ, sharing in the ministry of Christ as Mediator between God and Creation. This mission of mediation in Christ involves two integrally related movements – one from God

to Creation, and the other from Creation to God. The Church manifests God's love for the world in Christ – through word and deed – in identification with all humanity, in loving service and joyful proclamation; the Church, in that same identification with all humanity, lifts up to God its pain and suffering, hope and aspiration, joy and thanksgiving in intercessory prayer and eucharistic worship. Any imbalance between these two directions of the mediatory movement adversely affects our ministry and mission in the world.

Only a Church fully aware of how people in the world live and feel and think can adequately fulfil either aspect of this mediatory mission. It is at this point that the Church recognises the validity and significance of the ministry of others to the Church, in order that the Church may better understand and be in closer solidarity with the world, knowing and sharing its pains and yearnings. Only by responding attentively to others can we remove our ignorance and misunderstanding of others, and be better able to minister to them.

At the very heart of the Church's vocation in the world is the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen. Through its internal life of eucharistic worship, thanksgiving, intercessory prayer, through planning for mission and evangelism, through a daily lifestyle of solidarity with the poor, through advocacy even to confrontation with the powers that oppress human beings, the churches are trying to fulfil this evangelistic vocation.

7. The starting point of our proclamation is Christ and Christ crucified. "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (I Cor. 1:23). The Good News handed on to the Church is that God's grace was in Jesus Christ, who "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (II Cor. 8:9).

Following human wisdom, the wise men from the Orient who were looking for the child went to the palace of King Herod. They did not know that "there was no place for him in the inn" and that he was born in a manger, poor among the poor. He even went so far in his identification with the poverty of humankind that his family was obliged to take the route of political refugee to Egypt. He was raised as a worker, came proclaiming God's caring for the poor, announced blessedness for them, sided with the underprivileged, confronted the powerful and went to the cross to open

up a new life for humankind. As his disciples, we announce his solidarity with all the downtrodden and marginalised. Those who are considered to be nothing are precious in God's eyes (I Cor. 1: 26-31). To believe in Jesus the King is to accept his undeserved grace and enter with him into the Kingdom, taking sides with the poor struggling to overcome poverty. Both those who announce Jesus as the servant king and those who accept this announcement and respond to it are invited to enter with him daily in identification and participation with the poor of the earth.

With the Apostle Paul and all Christian churches, we confess Christ Jesus, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:6-11).

But Christ's identification with humanity went even more deeply, and while nailed on the cross, accused as a political criminal, he took upon himself the guilt even of those who crucified him. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The Christian confession reads, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (II Cor. 5:21). The cross is the place of the decisive battle between the powers of evil and the love of God. It uncovers the lostness of the world, the magnitude of human sinfulness, the tragedy of human alienation. The total self-surrendering of Christ reveals the immeasurable depth of God's love for the world (John 3:16).

On this same cross, Jesus was glorified. Here, God the Father glorified the Son of man, and in so doing confirmed Jesus as the Son of God (John 13:31). "The early Christians used many analogies to describe what they had experienced and what they believed had happened. The most striking picture is that of a sacrificed lamb, slaughtered but yet living, sharing the throne, which symbolised the heart of all power and sovereignty, with the living God".⁴

It is this Jesus that the Church proclaims as the very life of the world because on the cross he gave his own life for all that

all may live. In him misery, sin and death are defeated once forever. They cannot be accepted as having final power over human life. In him there is abundant life, life eternal. **The Church proclaims Jesus, risen from the dead. Through the resurrection, God vindicates Jesus, and opens up a new period of missionary obedience until he comes again (Acts 1:11).** The power of the risen and crucified Christ is now released. It is the new birth to a new life, because as he took our predicament on the cross, he also took us into a new life in his resurrection. "When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (II Cor. 5:17) (Appendix 4).

Evangelism calls people to look towards that Jesus and commit their life to him, to enter into the kingdom whose king has come in the powerless child of Bethlehem, in the murdered one on the cross.

4 *Your Kingdom Come*, p. 210.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. As the body of Christ, the Church participates in Christ's ministry of mediation between God and creation. List the various manifestations of these two movements as described in sub-section 6.

God to Creation	Creation to God

Discuss the relationships between these two movements and then consider whether there is any imbalance between them in your church and, if so, how this imbalance affects your witness.

2. Discuss the items you have listed in the category "Creation to God"; consider how these are a part of mission.

3. Awareness of "how people in the world live and feel and think" includes an understanding of one's own pain and yearning. In what ways might such self-understanding make us sensitive to the pain and yearnings of others?

4. List some of the ways in which Christ identified himself with sinners, the sick and poor people during his life on earth.

5. Traditionally, the death of Christ has been recognized as his

battle and triumph over sin and death. Do we recognize also in his death, his battle and triumph over *all* human deprivation?

6. Consider the ways in which Christ's battle against sin, poverty and death is a calling to Christians to sanctification, justice and hope for eternal life.

"Cases for Study #1 and #2" suggest other issues to be considered in a discussion of proclamation and witness. You may wish to extend your reflection by including those in your discussion.

ECUMENICAL CONVICTIONS

9. In the ecumenical discussions and experience, churches with their diverse confessions and traditions and in their various expressions as parishes, monastic communities, religious orders, etc., have learned to recognise each other as participants in the one worldwide missionary movement. *Thus, together, they can affirm an*

ecumenical perception of Christian mission expressed in the following convictions under which they covenant to work for the kingdom of God.

1. Conversion

10. The proclamation of the Gospel includes an invitation to recognise and accept in a personal decision the saving lordship of Christ. It is the announcement of a personal encounter, mediated by the Holy Spirit, with the living Christ, receiving his forgiveness and making a personal acceptance of the call to discipleship and a life of service. God addresses specifically each person, as well as the whole human race. Each person is entitled to hear the Good News. Many social forces today press for conformity and passivity. Masses of poor people have been deprived of their right to decide about their lives and the life of their society. While anonymity and marginalisation seem to reduce the possibilities for personal decisions to a minimum, God knows each person and calls each one to make a fundamental personal act of allegiance to God and to God's kingdom in the fellowship of God's people.

11. While the basic experience of conversion is the same, the awareness of an encounter with God revealed in Christ, the concrete occasion of this experience and the actual shape of the same differ in terms of our personal situation. The calling is to specific changes, to renounce evidences of the domination of sin in our lives and to accept responsibilities in terms of God's love for our neighbour. John the Baptist said very specifically to the soldiers what they should do; Jesus did not hesitate to indicate to the young ruler that his wealth was the obstacle to his discipleship.

Conversion happens in the midst of our historical reality and incorporates the totality of our life, because God's love is concerned with that totality. Jesus' call is an invitation to follow him joyfully, to participate in his servant body, to share with him in the struggle to overcome sin, poverty and death.

12. The importance of this decision is highlighted by the fact that God, through the Holy Spirit, helps the acceptance of the offering of fellowship. The New Testament calls this a new birth (John 3: 3). It is also called conversion, metanoia, total transformation of

our attitudes and styles of life. Conversion as a dynamic and ongoing process “involves a turning *from* and a turning *to*. It always demands reconciliation, a new relationship both with God and with others. It involves leaving our old security behind (Matt. 16:24) and putting ourselves at risk in a life of faith”.⁵ It is “conversion *from* a life characterised by sin, separation from God, submission to evil and the unfulfilled potential of God’s image, *to* a new life characterised by the forgiveness of sins, obedience to the commands of God, renewed fellowship with God in Trinity, growth in the restoration of the divine image and the realisation. . .of the love of Christ”.⁶

The call to conversion, as a call to repentance and obedience, should also be addressed to nations, groups and families. To proclaim the need to change from war to peace, from injustice to justice, from racism to solidarity, from hate to love is a witness rendered to Jesus Christ and to his kingdom. The prophets of the Old Testament addressed themselves constantly to the collective conscience of the people of Israel calling the rulers and the people to repentance and to renewal of the covenant.

13. Many of those who are attracted to Christ are put off by what they see in the churches as well as in individual Christians. How many of the millions of people in the world who are not confessing Jesus Christ have rejected him because of what they saw in the lives of Christians! Thus, the call to conversion should begin with the repentance of those who do the calling, who issue the invitation. Baptism in itself is a unique act, the covenant that Christians no longer belong to themselves but have been bought forever with the blood of Christ and belong to God. But the experience of baptism should be constantly re-enacted by daily dying with Christ to sin, to themselves and to the world, and rising again with him into the servant body of Christ to become a blessing for the surrounding community.

The experience of conversion gives meaning to people in all stages of life, endurance to resist oppression, and assurance that even death has no final power over human life because God in Christ has already taken our life with him, a life that is “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3).

5 *Your Kingdom Come*, p. 196.

6 *Confessing Christ Today*, Reports of Groups at a Consultation of Orthodox Theologians, p. 8.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Underline in this section all the synonyms and phrases used to explain the meaning of conversion. Then explain it in your own words.

2. Consider sharing your own personal experience of conversion with your study group. Using the experiences of the group illustrate what conversion means by listing some elements or specific aspects under these two headings.

Conversion is turning from:	Conversion is turning to:

Beware of vagueness on the one hand and legalism on the other as you discuss these aspects of conversion. Remember also that conversion is the work of God's Spirit and not simply a human decision.

3. Give three examples of the call to conversion that you believe God is addressing to your nation today.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Discuss how conversion might take place in each case. (The group may wish to include in its discussion #4 in "Cases for Study.")

4. Many people may be rejecting Christ's call to conversion because of what they see in the lives of Christians and in the lives of churches. Give an example of an obstacle to personal conversion from the life of your church.

Give an example of an obstacle to national conversion from the life of the churches in your country.

The group may wish to discuss "Cases for Study #3" as an example of an obstacle in our communication of the Gospel.

2. The Gospel to all Realms of Life

14. In the Bible, religious life was never limited to the temple or isolated from daily life (Hos. 6:4-6; Isa. 58:6-7). The teaching of Jesus on the kingdom of God is a clear reference to God's loving lordship over all human history. We cannot limit our witness to a supposedly private area of life. The lordship of Christ is to be proclaimed to all realms of life. In the Great Commission, Jesus said to his disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28: 19-20). The Good News of the kingdom is a challenge to the structures of society (Eph. 3:9-10; 6:12) as well as a call to individuals to repent. "If salvation from sin through divine forgiveness is to be truly and fully personal, it must express itself in the renewal of these relations and structures. Such renewal is not merely a consequence but an essential element of the conversion of whole human beings".⁷

15. "The Evangelistic Witness is directed towards all of the *ktisis* (creation) which groans and travails in search of adoption and redemption....The transfiguring power of the Holy Trinity is meant to reach into every nook and cranny of our national life....The Evangelistic Witness will also speak to the structures of this world; its economic, political and societal institutions....We must re-learn the patristic lesson that the Church is the mouth and voice of the poor and the oppressed in the presence of the powers that be. In our own way, we must learn once again 'how to speak to the ear of the King', on the people's behalf....Christ was sent for no lesser purpose than bringing the world into the life of God".⁸

16. In the fulfilment of its vocation, the Church is called to *announce* Good News in Jesus Christ, forgiveness, hope, a new heaven and a new earth; to *denounce* powers and principalities, sin and injustice; to *console* the widows and orphans, healing, restoring the brokenhearted; and to *celebrate* life in the midst of death. In carrying out these tasks, churches may meet limitations, constraints, even persecution from prevailing powers which pretend to have final authority over the life and destiny of people.

17. In some countries there is pressure to limit religion to the private life of the believer – to assert that freedom to believe should be enough. The Christian faith challenges that assumption. **The Church claims the right and the duty to exist publicly – visibly – and to address itself openly to issues of human concern.** “Confessing Christ *today* means that the Spirit makes us struggle with. . . sin and forgiveness, power and powerlessness, exploitation and misery, the universal search for identify, the widespread loss of Christian motivation, and the spiritual longings of those who have not heard Christ’s name. It means that we are in communion with the prophets who announced God’s will and promise for humankind and society, with the martyrs who sealed their confession with suffering and death, and also with the doubtful who can only whisper their confession of the Name”.⁹

18. The realm of science and technology deserves particular attention today. The everyday life of most children, women and men, whether rich or poor, is affected by the avalanche of scientific discoveries. Pharmaceutical science has revolutionised sexual behaviour. Increasingly sophisticated computers solve problems in seconds for which formerly a whole lifetime was needed; at the same time they become a means of invading the privacy of millions of people. Nuclear power threatens the survival of life on this planet, while at the same time it provides a new source of energy. Biological research stands at the awesome frontier of interference with the genetic code which could – for better or for worse – change the whole human species. Scientists are, therefore, seeking ethical guidance. Behind the questions as to right or wrong decisions and attitudes, however, there are ultimate theological questions: what is the meaning of human existence? the goal of history? the true reality within and beyond what can be tested and quantified empirically? The ethical questions arise out of a quest for a new world view, a faith.

19. The biblical stories and ancient creeds do furnish precious insights for witnessing to the Gospel in the scientific world. Can theologians, however, with these insights, help scientists achieve responsible action in genetic engineering or nuclear physics? It would hardly seem possible so long as the great communication gap between these two groups persists. Those directly involved in and affected by scientific research can best discern and explicate the insights of Christian faith in terms of specific ethical positions.

Christian witness will point towards Jesus Christ in whom real humanity is revealed and who is in God's wisdom the centre of all creation, the "head over all things" (Eph. 1:10; 22f). This witness will show the glory and the humility of human stewardship on earth.

7 *Breaking Barriers*, p. 233.

8 *Confessing Christ Today*, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 and 3.

9 *Breaking Barriers*, p. 48.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Because God's kingdom and love are concerned with all of life, we are called to witness in every area. Give one concrete example of the church's witness in your community or nation for each of the following.

a. To *announce* Good News: _____

b. To *denounce* evil use of power: _____

c. To *console* and to heal: _____

d. To *celebrate* life in the midst of death: _____

Discuss whether your church needs to extend its witness in these areas; if so, suggest specific ways.

2. In many parts of the world, political and economic powers presume to have absolute authority over the life and destiny of people.

a. Can you give an example from your country: _____

b. What should be the church's response? _____

3. In many places, the churches are under pressure (from without or within) to limit their message and ministry to private religious matters.

a. Can you give an example from your country: _____

b. What should be the church's response? _____

The group may wish to discuss "Cases for Study #5" at this point.

4. Sub-section 18 mentions several examples of scientific discoveries and technological innovation that profoundly affect

modern life. List several areas (from this paragraph or elsewhere) for which you think the church has failed to raise ethical questions or provide theological guidance.

3. The Church and its Unity in God's Mission

20. To receive the message of the kingdom of God is to be incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church, the author and sustainer of which is the Holy Spirit (Appendix 5). The churches are to be a sign for the world. They are to intercede as he did, to serve as he did. **Thus, Christian mission is the action of the body of Christ in the history of humankind – a continuation of Pentecost. Those who through conversion and baptism accept the Gospel of Jesus, partake in the life of the body of Christ and participate in an historical tradition.** Sadly there are many betrayals of this high calling in the history of the churches. Many who are attracted to the vision of the kingdom find it difficult to be attracted to the concrete reality of the Church. They are invited to join in a continual process of renewal of the churches. “The challenge facing the churches is not that the modern world is unconcerned about their evangelistic message, but rather whether they are so renewed in their life and thought that they become a living witness to the integrity of the Gospel. The evangelising churches need themselves to receive the Good News and to let the Holy Spirit remake their life when and how he wills”¹⁰ (Appendix 6).

21. The celebration of the eucharist is the place for the renewal of the missionary conviction at the heart of every congregation.

According to the Apostle Paul, the celebration of the eucharist is in itself a “proclamation of the death of the Lord until he comes” (I Cor. 11:26). “In such ways God feeds his people as they celebrate the mystery of the Eucharist so that they may confess in word and deed that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”¹¹ (Appendix 7).

The eucharist is bread for a missionary people. We acknowledge with deep sorrow the fact that Christians do not join together at the Lord’s table. This contradicts God’s will and impoverishes the body of Christ. The credibility of our Christian witness is at stake.

22. Christians are called to work for the renewal and transformation of the churches. Today there are many signs of the work of the Holy Spirit in such a renewal. *The house gatherings of the Church in China or the Basic Ecclesial Communities in Latin America, the liturgical renewal, biblical renewal, the revival of the monastic vocation, the charismatic movement, are indications of the renewal possibilities of the Church of Jesus Christ.*

23. In the announcement to the world of the reconciliation in Jesus Christ, churches are called to unite. Faced with the challenge and threat of the world, the churches often unite to defend common positions. **But common witness should be the natural consequence of their unity with Christ in his mission.** The ecumenical experience has discovered the reality of a deep spiritual unity. The common recognition of the authority of the Bible and of the creeds of the ancient Church and a growing convergence in doctrinal affirmations should allow the churches not only to affirm together the fundamentals of the Christian faith, but also to proclaim together the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world. In solidarity, churches are helping each other in their respective witness before the world. In the same solidarity, they should share their spiritual and material resources to announce together and clearly their common hope and common calling.

24. “Often it is socially and politically more difficult to witness together since the powers of this world promote division. In such situations common witness is particularly precious and Christ-like. Witness that dares to be common is a powerful sign of unity coming directly and visibly from Christ and a glimpse of his kingdom”¹²

The impulse for common witness comes from the depth of our

faith. "Its urgency is underlined when we realise the seriousness of the human predicament and the tremendous task waiting for the churches at present".¹³

25. It is at the heart of Christian mission to foster the multiplication of local congregations in every human community. The planting of the seed of the Gospel will bring forward a people gathered around the Word and sacraments and called to announce God's revealed purpose.

Thanks to the faithful witness of disciples through the ages, churches have sprung up in practically every country. **This task of sowing seed needs to be continued until there is, in every human community, a cell of the kingdom, a church confessing Jesus Christ and in his name serving his people.** The building up of the Church in every place is essential to the Gospel. The vicarious work of Christ demands the presence of a vicarious people. A vital instrument for the fulfilment of the missionary vocation of the Church is the local congregation.

26. The planting of the Church in different cultures demands a positive attitude towards inculturation of the Gospel. Ancient churches, through centuries of intimate relations with the cultures and aspirations of their people, have proved the powerful witnessing character of this rooting of the churches in the national soil. "Inculturation has its source and inspiration in the mystery of the Incarnation. The Word was made flesh. Here flesh means the fully concrete, human and created reality that Jesus was. Inculturation, therefore, becomes another way of describing Christian mission. If proclamation sees mission in the perspective of the Word to be proclaimed, inculturation sees mission in the perspective of the flesh, or concrete embodiment, which the Word assumes in a particular individual, community, institution or culture".¹⁴

Inculturation should not be understood merely as intellectual research; it occurs when Christians express their faith in the symbols and images of their respective culture. *The best way to stimulate the process of inculturation is to participate in the struggle of the less privileged for their liberation. Solidarity is the best teacher of common cultural values.*

27. This growing cultural diversity could create some difficulties. In our attempt to express the catholicity of the Church, we may lose the sense of its unity. **But the unity we look for is not uni-**

formity but the multiple expression of a common faith and a common mission.

“We have found this confession of Christ out of our various cultural contexts to be not only a mutually inspiring, but also a mutually corrective exchange. Without this sharing our individual affirmations would gradually become poorer and narrower. We need each other to regain the lost dimensions of confessing Christ and to discover dimensions unknown to us before. Sharing in this way, we are all changed and our cultures are transformed”.¹⁵

The vision of nations coming from the East, the West, the North and the South to sit at the final banquet of the kingdom should always be before us in our missionary endeavour.

10 Philip Potter, *op. cit.*

11 *Your Kingdom Come*, p. 206.

12 *Common Witness*, p. 28.

13 *Ibid.*

14 SEDOS Bulletin 81/No. 7.

15 *Breaking Barriers*, p. 46.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. As the body of Christ, the church should be a manifestation of God's kingdom and serve as Christ did.

a. Try to explain how the people of your community see your church – as a sign of what?

b. What actions do you think your church could take to be more clearly a sign of the kingdom in your community?

2. Explain what Paul meant when he wrote that the eucharist is a *proclamation* of the death of Christ.

Explain how congregations are renewed for mission through the celebration of the eucharist.

The group may wish to discuss "Cases for Study #6."

3. Sub-section 22 mentions various renewal movements. Do you know of renewal movements in your country? List some which you think are important.

Discuss both the contributions and the limitations or problems of these movements.

4. Because they belong to the one and the same body of Christ, the churches, across Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, etc., lines, are called to join together to make a common witness at home and abroad.
- a. Give an example of your congregation's common witness

with other local congregations. _____

b. Give an example of your congregation's solidarity in witness with churches in other parts of the world.

The group may wish to include the experience in "Cases for Study #7" in the discussion.

5. Is your congregation directly engaged in planting and nurturing other congregations? If so, explain how. If not, discuss how it might do so.

6. Your church is called to express the Gospel in the symbols and images of your culture. Give an example in which your church makes an appropriate use of a local symbol.

The Gospel challenges all cultural values and practices. Can you give an example from the life of your church where a cultural practice or value is inappropriate to the Gospel?

4. Mission in Christ's Way

28. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20: 21). The self-emptying of the servant who lived among the people, sharing in their hopes and sufferings, giving his life on the cross for all humanity – this was Christ's way of proclaiming the Good News, and as disciples we are summoned to follow the same way. "A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him" (John 13:16).

Our obedience in mission should be patterned on the ministry and teaching of Jesus. He gave his love and his time to all people. He praised the widow who gave her last coin to the temple; he received Nicodemus during the night; he called Matthew to the apostolate; he visited Zacchaeus in his home; he gave himself in a special way to the poor, consoling, affirming and challenging them. He spent long hours in prayer and lived in dependence on and willing obedience to God's will.

An imperialistic crusader's spirit was foreign to him. Churches are free to choose the ways they consider best to announce the Gospel to different people in different circumstances. But these options are never neutral. Every methodology illustrates or betrays the Gospel we announce. In all communications of the Gospel, power must be subordinate to love.

29. Our societies are undergoing a significant and rapid change

under the impact of new communication technologies and their applications. We are entering the age of the information society, characterised by an ever increasing media presence in all relationships, both interpersonal and intersocial. Christians need to re-think critically their responsibility for all communication processes and re-define the values of Christian communications. In the use of all new media options, the communicating church must ensure that these instruments of communication are not masters, but servants in the proclaiming of the kingdom of God and its values. As servants, the new media options, kept within their own limits, will help to liberate societies from communication bondage and will place tools in the hands of communities for witnessing to Jesus Christ.

30. Evangelism happens in terms of interpersonal relations when the Holy Spirit quickens to faith. Through sharing the pains and joys of life, identifying with people, the Gospel is understood and communicated.

Often, the primary confessors are precisely the non-publicised, unsensational people who gather together steadfastly in small caring communities, whose life prompts the question: "What is the source of the meaning of your life? What is the power of your powerlessness", giving the occasion to name THE NAME? Shared experiences reveal how often Christ is confessed in the very silence of a prison cell or of a restricted but serving, waiting, praying church.

Mission calls for a serving church in every land, a church which is willing to be marked with the stigmata (nailmarks) of the crucified and risen Lord. In this way the church will show that it belongs to that movement of God's love shown in Christ who went to the periphery of life. Dying outside the gates of the city (Heb. 13:12), he is the high priest offering himself for the salvation of the world. Outside the city gates the message of a self-giving sharing love is truly proclaimed, here the Church renews its vocation to be the body of Christ in joyful fellowship with its risen Lord (I John 3:16).

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. No matter how Christ-centered and biblical our message may sound, we sometimes carry out our mission in ways that are unlike Christ and unbiblical.

a. Give an illustration of this problem from the life of your church. _____

b. Give an illustration from popular evangelism.

Discuss this statement: "Every methodology illustrates or betrays the Gospel we announce." (The group may wish to include the ideas of "Cases for Study #9" in this discussion.)

2. Make a list of the words in paragraph two of this section which describe Christ's ministry. Suggest how each of these activities are carried out in your church's mission activities.

Do some receive more time and attention than others?

3. The modern communication media are powerful instruments for disseminating facts and interpretations, shaping opinions and attitudes, and leading people to make decisions and to take action. Give examples to show that these media could become masters instead of servants of the church in the proclamation of God's kingdom.

a. Media as servants: _____

b. Media as masters: _____

Be prepared to face differing opinions regarding specific programs or evangelists.

4. Some western television evangelism programs are broadcast in impoverished Third World countries. What do you think their mission impact is?

5. Much communication of the Gospel takes place by quiet example and simple witness in families, small groups and congregations.

a. How did you come to meaningful faith in Jesus Christ?

b. How do you think your Christian friends came to believe the Gospel?

6. Would you characterise your church as a serving church marked with the self-emptying and sufferings of Christ? Explain your answer.

Compare the witness of your church with the witness of powerless Christians in other places. (The group may wish to discuss "Cases for Study #8.")

5. Good News to the Poor

31. There is a new awareness of the growing gap between wealth and poverty among the nations and inside each nation. It is a cruel reality that the number of people who do not reach the material level for a normal human life is growing steadily. An increasing number of people find themselves marginalised, second-class citi-

zens, unable to control their own destiny and unable to understand what is happening around them. Racism, powerlessness, solitude, breaking of family and community ties are new evidences of the marginalisation that comes under the category of poverty.

32. There is also a tragic coincidence that most of the world's poor have not heard the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or they could not receive it, because it was not recognised as Good News in the way in which it was brought. This is a double injustice: they are victims of the oppression of an unjust economic order or an unjust political distribution of power, and at the same time they are deprived of the knowledge of God's special care for them. To announce the Good News to the poor is to begin to render the justice due to them. The Church of Jesus Christ is called to preach the Good News to the poor following the example of its Lord who was incarnated as poor, who lived as one among them and gave to them the promise of the kingdom of God. Jesus looked at the multitudes with compassion. He recognised the poor as those who were sinned against, victims of both personal and structural sin.

Out of this deep awareness came both his solidarity and his calling to them (Matt. 11:28). His calling was a personalised one. He invited them to come to him to receive forgiveness of sins and to assume a task. He called them to follow him, because his love incorporated his respect for them as people created by God with freedom to respond. He called them to exercise this responsibility towards God, neighbours and their own lives. The proclamation of the Gospel among the poor is a sign of the messianic kingdom and a priority criterion by which to judge the validity of our missionary engagement today (Appendix 8).

33. This new awareness is an invitation to re-think priorities and lifestyles both in the local church and in the worldwide missionary endeavour. Of course, churches and Christians find themselves in very different contexts: some in very wealthy settings where the experience of poverty as it is known to millions in the world today is practically unknown, or in egalitarian societies where the basic needs of life seem to be assured for almost everybody, to situations of extreme poverty. But the consciousness of the global nature of poverty and exploitation in the world today, the knowledge of the interdependence between nations and the understanding of the international missionary responsibility of the Church – all invite, in fact oblige, every church and every Christian to think of ways

and means to share the Good News with the poor of today. An objective look at the life of every society, even the most affluent and those which are, theoretically, more just, will show the reality of the poor today in the marginalised, the drop-outs who cannot cope with modern society, the prisoners of conscience, the dissidents. All of them are waiting for a cup of cold water or for a visit in the name of Christ. Churches are learning afresh through the poor of the earth to overcome the old dichotomies between evangelism and social action. The "spiritual Gospel" and "material Gospel" were in Jesus one Gospel.

There is no evangelism without solidarity; there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve sharing the knowledge of the kingdom which is God's promise to the poor of the earth. There is here a double credibility test: A proclamation that does not hold forth the promises of the justice of the kingdom to the poor of the earth is a caricature of the Gospel; but Christian participation in the struggles for justice which does not point towards the promises of the kingdom also makes a caricature of a Christian understanding of justice.

A growing consensus among Christians today speaks of God's preferential option for the poor.¹⁶ We have there a valid yardstick to apply to our lives as individual Christians, local congregations and as missionary people of God in the world.

35. This concentration point, God's preferential option for the poor, raises the question of the Gospel for all those who objectively are not poor or do not consider themselves as such. *It is a clear Christian conviction that God wants all human beings to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth, but we know that, while God's purpose is for the salvation of all. God has worked historically through the people of Israel and through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. While God's purpose is universal, God's action is always particular.* What we are learning anew today is that God works through the downtrodden, the persecuted, the poor of the earth. And from there, God is calling humanity to follow. "If any one would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24).

For all of us, the invitation is clear: to follow Jesus in identification and sharing with the weak, marginalised and poor of the world, because in them we encounter him. Knowing from the Gospel and from historical experience that to be rich is to risk forfeiting the kingdom, and knowing how close the links are, in to-

day's world, between the abundance of some and the needs of others, Christians are challenged to follow him, surrendering all they are and have to the kingdom, to a struggle that commits us against all injustice, against all want. The preferential option for the poor, instead of discriminating against all other human beings, is, on the contrary, a guideline for the priorities and behaviour of all Christians everywhere, pointing to the values around which we should organise our lives and the struggle in which we should put our energy.

36. There is a long experience in the Church of voluntary poverty, people who in obedience to their Christian calling cast aside all their belongings, make their own the fate of the poor of the earth, becoming one of them and living among them. Voluntary poverty has always been recognised as a source of spiritual inspiration, of insight into the heart of the Gospel.

Today we are gratefully surprised, as churches are growing among the poor of the earth, by the insight and perspective of the Gospel coming from the communities of the poor. They are discovering dimensions of the Gospel which have long been forgotten by the Church. The poor of the earth are reading reality from the other side, from the side of those who do not get the attention of the history books written by the conquerors, but who surely get God's attention in the book of life. Living with the poor and understanding the Bible from their perspective helps to discover the particular caring with which God, both in the Old and in the New Testament thinks of the marginalised, the downtrodden and the deprived. We realise that the poor to whom Jesus promised the kingdom of God are blessed in their longing for justice and in their hope for liberation. They are both subjects and bearers of the Good News; they have the right and the duty to announce the Gospel not only among themselves, but also to all other sectors of the human family.

Churches of the poor are spreading the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ in almost every corner of the earth. The richness and freshness of their experience is an inspiration and blessing to churches with a centuries-old history. The centres of the missionary expansion of the Church are moving from the North to the South. God is working through the poor of the earth to awaken the consciousness of humanity to God's call for repentance, for justice and for love.

16 Catholic Bishops Conference, Puebla, 1979, para. 1134.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. The material in this section is complex, potentially controversial, and very important. It raises historical, economic, and political questions that Christians must deal with spiritually (guided by the Holy Spirit) and theologically (guided by the Bible). Read through the entire section, underlining important points and placing question marks beside statements with which you may have difficulty.
2. Are there poor and marginalized people in your church?
Note ways in which people are marginalized and impoverished in your social context:

In the world context:

Consider whether your church has been an effective agent of the Gospel among poor and marginalized people.

3. The affirmation points to the correlation between those unreached by the Gospel and the poor people of the world. How does that fact affect our thinking about those who are poor?
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-

What does it suggest about our mission priorities and methodologies?

4. Does your own experience confirm the statement that "there is no evangelism without solidarity"?

5. Whereas Jesus identified himself with the weak, marginalized and poor, some churches have rich and influential members. Suggest ways in which these churches can express their solidarity with poor and marginalized people.

6. Try to show how the Gospel of Jesus Christ is Good News both to the poor and to the rich, though the implications for action may be different.

Good News to the Poor	Good News to the Rich

The group may wish to include the experience in "Cases for Study #10" in this discussion.

7. What can affluent churches learn from the experience of the poor?

Can you think of specific ways in which your church can learn from the experience of the poor?

The group may wish to discuss "Cases for Study #11."

8. List the questions on this topic that you feel should be examined further.

6. Mission in and to Six Continents

37. Everywhere the churches are in missionary situations. Even in countries where the churches have been active for centuries we see life organised today without reference to Christian values, a growth

of secularism understood as the absence of any final meaning. The churches have lost vital contact with the workers and the youth and many others. This situation is so urgent that it commands priority attention of the ecumenical movement. The movement of migrants and political refugees brings the missionary frontier to the doorstep of every parish. **The Christian affirmations on the worldwide missionary responsibility of the Church will be credible if they are authenticated by a serious missionary engagement at home.**

As the world becomes smaller, it is possible even for Christians living far away to be aware of and inspired by faithful missionary engagement in a local situation. Of special importance today is the expression of solidarity among the churches crossing political frontiers and the symbolic actions of obedience of one part of the body of Christ that enhance the missionary work of other sectors of the Church. So, for example, while programmes related to the elimination of racism may be seen as problems for some churches, such programmes have become, for other churches, a sign of solidarity, an opportunity for witness and a test of Christian authenticity.

Every local congregation needs the awareness of its catholicity which comes from its participation in the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ in other parts of the world. Through its witnessing stance in its own situation, its prayers of intercession for churches in other parts of the world, and its sharing of persons and resources, it participates fully in the world mission of the Christian Church.

38. This concern for mission everywhere has been tested with the call for a moratorium, a halt — at least for a time — to sending and receiving missionaries and resources across national boundaries, in order to encourage the recovery and affirmation of the identity of every church, the concentration on mission in its own place and the freedom to reconsider traditional relations. The Lausanne Covenant noted that “the reduction of foreign missionaries and money in an evangelised country may sometimes be necessary to facilitate the national church’s growth and self-reliance and to release resources for unevangelised areas”.¹⁷ Moratorium does not mean the end of the missionary vocation nor of the duty to provide resources for missionary work, but it does mean freedom to reconsider present engagements and to see whether a continuation of what we have been doing for so long is the right style of mission in our day.

Moratorium has to be understood *inside* a concern for world mission. It is faithfulness of commitment to Christ in each national situation which makes missionary concern in other parts of the world authentic. There can never be a moratorium of mission, but it will always be possible, and sometimes necessary, to have a moratorium for the sake of better mission.

39. The story of the churches from their earliest years is the story of faithfulness in their respective localities, but also the story of the carrying of the Gospel across national and continental boundaries; first from Jerusalem to Judaea and Samaria, then to Asia Minor, Africa and Europe, now to the ends of the earth. Christians today are the heirs of a long history of those who left their home countries and churches, apostles, monastics, pilgrims, missionaries, emigrants, to work in the name of Jesus Christ, serving and preaching where the Gospel had not yet been heard or received. With the European colonisation of most of the world and later on with the expansion of the colonial and neo-colonial presence of the western powers, the churches which had their bases mainly in the West have expanded their missionary service to all corners of the earth.

Surely, many ambiguities have accompanied this development and are present even today, not least the sin of proselytism among other Christian confessions. Churches and missionary organizations are analysing the experience of these past centuries in order to correct their ways, precisely with the help of the new churches which have come into being in those countries. The history of the Church, the missionary people of God, needs to continue. Each local parish, each Christian, must be challenged to assume responsibility in the total mission of the Church. There will always be need for those who have the calling and the gift to cross frontiers, to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to serve in his name (Appendix 9).

40. Out of this sense of being the whole Church in mission, we recognise the specific calling to individuals or communities to commit themselves full time to the service of the church, crossing cultural and national frontiers. The churches should not allow this specialised calling of the few to be an alibi for the whole Church, but rather it should be a symbolic concentration of the missionary vocation of the whole Church. Looking at the question of people in mission today, "We perceive a change in the direction of mission, arising from our understanding of the Christ who is the centre and who is always in movement towards the periphery. While not in

any way denying the continuing significance and necessity of a mutuality between the churches in the northern and southern hemispheres, we believe that we can discern a development whereby mission in the eighties may increasingly take place within these zones. We feel there will be increasing traffic between the churches of Asia, Africa and Latin America among whose numbers both rich and poor are counted. This development, we expect, will take the form of ever stronger initiatives from the churches of the poor and oppressed at the peripheries. Similarly, among the industrialised countries a new reciprocity, particularly one stemming from the marginalised groups, may lead to sharing at the peripheries of the richer societies. While resources may still flow from financially richer to poorer churches, and while it is not our intention to encourage isolationism, we feel that a benefit of this new reality could well be the loosening of the bond of domination and dependence that still so scandalously characterises the relationship between many churches of the northern and southern hemispheres respectively".¹⁸

17 Lausanne Covenant, No. 9.

18 *Your Kingdom Come*, pp. 220/221.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Do the members of your local congregation generally think of their own situation as a missionary situation?

List several evidences that it is indeed a missionary situation.

The group may wish to include "Cases for Study #12" in its discussion.

2. List various different ways in which your congregation participates in the world mission of the church (in partnership with other churches, in sending persons with a mission vocation, etc.).

3. Give an example of the way in which your church's missionary engagement at home authenticates its mission efforts abroad.

Give an example of your church's lack of missionary engagement at home that might call into question its efforts abroad.

4. In the context of this discussion about mission and evangelism, would you say that missionaries serving abroad are a *challenge* to the whole church to fulfill its missionary vocation in every place? Or do the members of your church tend to support missionaries *instead of* taking responsibility for mission in their local context? Explain your answer.

5. Give two reasons why "moratorium" can be for the sake of better mission.

a. _____

b. _____

7. Witness among People of Living Faiths

41. Christians owe the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to every person and to every people. Christians make their witness in the context of neighbours who live by other religious convictions and ideological persuasions. **True witness follows Jesus Christ in respecting and affirming the uniqueness and freedom of others.** We confess, as Christians, that we have often looked for the worst in others and have passed negative judgement upon other religions. We hope as Christians to be learning to witness to our neighbours in a humble, repentant and joyful spirit (Appendix 10).

42. The Word is at work in every human life. In Jesus of Nazareth, the Word became a human being. The wonder of his ministry of love persuades Christians to testify to people of every religious and non-religious persuasion of this decisive presence of God in Christ. In him is our salvation. Among Christians there are still differences of understanding as to how this salvation in Christ is available to people of diverse religious persuasions. But all agree that witness should be rendered to all.

43. Such an attitude springs from the assurance that God is the creator of the whole universe and that he has not left himself without witness at any time or any place. The Spirit of God is constantly at work in ways that pass human understanding and in places that to us are least expected. In entering into a relationship of dialogue with others, therefore, Christians seek to discern the unsearchable riches of God and the way God deals with humanity. For Christians who come from cultures shaped by another faith, an even more intimate interior dialogue takes place as they seek to establish the connection in their lives between their cultural heritage and the deep convictions of their Christian faith.

44. Christians should use every opportunity to join hands with their neighbours, to work together to be communities of freedom, peace and mutual respect. In some places, state legislation hinders the freedom of conscience and the real exercise of religious freedom. Christian churches as well as communities of other faiths cannot be faithful to their vocation without the freedom and right to maintain their institutional form and confessional identity in a society and to transmit their faith from one generation to another. In those difficult situations, Christians should find a way, along with others, to enter into dialogue with the civil authorities in order to reach a common definition of religious freedom. With that freedom comes the responsibility to defend through common actions all human rights in those societies (Appendix 11).

45. Life with people of other faiths and ideologies is an encounter of commitments. Witness cannot be a one-way process, but of necessity is two-way; in it Christians become aware of some of the deepest convictions of their neighbours. It is also the time in which, within a spirit of openness and trust, Christians are able to bear authentic witness, giving an account of their commitment to the Christ, who calls all persons to himself.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Many people think it is presumptuous, offensive, or even in some situations dangerous to witness to people of other religions. Explain how such witness might be "humble, repentant, and joyful."

The group may wish to refer to "Cases for Study #13."

2. The text gives several reasons or purposes for dialogue with people of other religions. Underline them. Are there opportunities for your church to engage in dialogue?

3. At the two extremes of attitudes toward dialogue are Christians who think of dialogue with people of other religions only in terms of convincing them to accept Christ as Saviour and Lord, and Christians who think that dialogue should not call for everyone's salvation in Jesus Christ. What do you (and your group) think should be the purpose of dialogue?

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

46. Whether among the *secularised masses of industrial societies*, the *emerging new ideologies* around which societies are organised, the *resurging religions* which people embrace, the *movements of workers and political refugees*, the *people's search for liberation and justice*, the *uncertain pilgrimage of the younger generation* into a future both full of promise and overshadowed by nuclear confrontation, the Church is called to be present and to articulate the meaning of God's love in Jesus Christ for every person and for every situation.

47. The missionary vocation of the Church and its evangelistic calling will not resist the confrontation with the hard realities of daily life if it is not sustained by faith, a faith supported by prayer, contemplation and adoration. "Gathering and dispersing, receiving and giving, praise and work, prayer and struggle – this is the true rhythm of Christian engagement in the world".¹⁹ Christians must bring their hearts, minds and wills to the altar of God, knowing that from worship comes wisdom, from prayer comes strength, and from fellowship comes endurance. "To be incorporated into Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit is the greatest blessing of the kingdom, and the only abiding ground of our missionary activity in the world".²⁰ The same Lord who sends his people to cross all frontiers and to enter into the most unknown territories in his name, is the one who assures: "I am with you always, to the close of the age".

19 *Your Kingdom Come*, p. 205.

20 *Your Kingdom Come*, p. 204.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Sub-section 46 lists several contemporary situations in which the Church must be present and express the meaning of God's love. Make your own list of the priority situations in which

your church needs to be present and make its witness and service.

2. Choose one of the above situations (mark it with an "x") and outline a tentative plan or proposal for your church to engage in mission in that situation.

3. Sub-section 47 mentions several means by which Christians sustain their faith for engagement in the world. Suggest ways in which your plan for mission might utilize these means.

a. Worship: _____

b. Prayer: _____

c. Fellowship: _____

Suggest ways in which the churches can prepare and enable every Christian to engage in the missionary vocation of the Church.

4. At the conclusion of these studies your group may wish to discuss and refine plans and proposals for mission and evangelism; they may want to plan a program to challenge their congregation(s) to re-examine their concepts of mission; or they may decide upon other specific steps forward in their pilgrimage.

APPENDICES

1. Now, the Gospel was given to the Apostles for us by the Lord Jesus; and Jesus the Christ was sent from God. That is to say, Christ received His commission from God, and the Apostles theirs from Christ. The order of these two events was in accordance with the will of God. So thereafter, when the Apostles had been given their instructions, and all their doubts had been set at rest by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, they set out in the full assurance of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the coming of God's kingdom. And as they went through the territories and townships preaching, they appointed their first converts – after testing them by the Spirit – to be bishops and deacons for the believers of the future.

(Clement of Rome, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 42, p. 45)

2. The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live apart in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, nor practise any eccentric way of life. The doctrine they profess is not the invention of busy human minds and brains, nor are they, like some, adherents of this or that school of human thought. They pass their lives in whatever township – Greek or foreign – each man's lot has determined, and conform to ordinary local usage in their clothing, diet, and other habits. Nevertheless, the organization of their community does exhibit some features that are remarkable, and even surprising. For instance, though they are residents at home in their own countries, their behaviour there is more like that of transients; they take their full part as citizens, but they also submit to anything and everything as if they were aliens. For them, any foreign country is a motherland, and any motherland is a foreign country. Like other men, they marry and beget children, though they do not expose their infants. Any Christian is free to share his neighbour's table, but never his marriage-bed. Though destiny has placed them here in the flesh, they do not live after the flesh; their days are passed on the earth, but their citizenship is above in the heavens. They obey the prescribed laws, but in their own private lives they transcend the laws. They show love to all men – and all men persecute them. They are misunderstood, and condemned; yet by suffering death they are quickened into life. They are poor yet making many rich; lacking all things, yet having all things in abundance. They are dishonoured, yet made glorious in their very dishonour; slandered, yet vindicated. They repay calumny with blessings, and abuse with courtesy. For the good they do, they suffer stripes as evil-doers; and under the strokes they rejoice like men given new life. Jews assail them as heretics, and Greeks harass them with persecutions; and yet of all their ill-wishers there is not one who can produce good grounds for his hostility.

To put it briefly, the relation of Christians to the world is that of a soul to the body... (*The Epistle to Diognetus*, points 5 and 6)

3. There is no single way to witness to Jesus Christ. The Church has borne witness in different times and places in different ways. This is important. There are occasions when dynamic action in society is called for; there are others when a word must be spoken; others when the behaviour of Christians one to another is the telling witness. On still other occasions the simple presence of a worshipping community or man is the witness. These different dimensions of witness to the one Lord are always a matter of concrete obedience. To take them in isolation from one another is to distort the Gospel. They are inextricably bound together, and together give the true dimensions of evangelism. The important thing is that God's redeeming Word be proclaimed and heard.

(*Theological Reflection on the Work of Evangelism*, 1959)

4. Through Christ men and women are liberated and empowered with all their energies and possibilities to participate in his Messianic work. Through his death on the Cross and his resurrection from the dead hope of salvation becomes realistic and reality hopeful. He liberates from the prison of guilt. He takes the inevitability out of history. In him the Kingdom of God and

of free people is at hand. Faith in Christ releases in man creative freedom for the salvation of the world. He who separates himself from the mission of God separates himself from salvation.

(Bangkok Assembly 1973, p. 88)

5. Those who take part in the life of Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour, Liberator and Unifier, are gathered in a community of which the author and sustainer is the Holy Spirit. This communion of the Spirit finds its primary aim and ultimate purpose in the eucharistic celebration and the glorification of the Triune God. The doxology is the supreme confession which transcends all our divisions.

(Breaking Barriers, p. 48)

6. As Monseigneur Etchegaray said to the Synod a few days ago: "A church which is being renewed in order more effectively to evangelise is a church which is itself willing to be evangelised....We lack not so much the words to say to people as credible persons to say the Word". ("Une église qui se renouvelle pour mieux évangéliser est une église qui accepte d'être évangélisée elle-même....Il nous manque moins de paroles à dire aux hommes que d'hommes crédibles pour dire la parole".)

(Philip Potter's speech to the Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops, Rome, 1974)

7. There are times and places where the very act of coming together to celebrate the Eucharist can be a public witness. In certain states Christians may be discouraged from attending such worship or penalised for it. We hear of those who come together at great risk, and whose courage reveals to those around them how precious in this sacrament. In other situations the Eucharist may be an open-air witness so planned that many may see it. Such a joyful celebration as this may offer fresh hope in cynical, secular societies. There is, at the Lord's table, a vision of God which draws the human heart to the Lord....Each Christian minister and congregation has to seek this understanding, and we can only give some indications: Where a people is being harshly oppressed, the Eucharist speaks of the exodus or deliverance from bondage. Where Christians are rejected or imprisoned for their faith, the bread and wine become the life of the Lord who was rejected by men but has become "the chief stone of the corner". Where the church sees a diminishing membership and its budgets are depressing, the Eucharist declares that there are no limits to God's giving and no end to hope in him. Where discrimination by race, sex or class is a danger for the community, the Eucharist enables people of all sorts to partake of the one food and to be made one people. Where people are affluent and at ease with life, the Eucharist says, "As Christ shares his life, share what you have with the hungry". Where a congregation is isolated by politics or war or geography, the Eucharist unites us with all God's people in all places and all ages. Where a sister or brother is near death, the Eucharist becomes a doorway into the kingdom of our loving Father.

(Your Kingdom Come, pp. 205-206)

8. The proclamation of the Gospel to the poor is a sign of the new age inaugurated by Jesus Christ. As witnessed in the Scriptures, the situation of the poor, and what the Holy Spirit can do among them, is a wonderful locus for the manifestation of God's love and power. This implies that evangelisation to the poor, with the poor, for and by the poor, must be considered one of the churches' highest priorities.

(Towards a Church in Solidarity with the Poor, p. 26)

9. The proclamation of the Good News is a continual necessity and all people, believers and unbelievers, are challenged to hear and respond since conversion is never finished. We acknowledge and gladly accept our special obligation to those who have never heard the Good News of the kingdom. New frontiers are continually being discovered. Jesus our Lord is always ahead of us and draws us to follow him, often in unexpected ways. The Christian community is a community on the way, making its proclamation, both to itself and to those beyond its fellowship, even as it shows forth its other marks "on the way".

(Your Kingdom Come, p. 195)

10. Christians engaged in faithful "dialogue in community" with people of other faiths and ideologies cannot avoid asking themselves penetrating questions about the place of these people in the activity of God in history. They ask these questions not in theory, but in terms of what God may be doing in the lives of hundreds of millions of men and women who live in and seek community together with Christians, but along different ways. So dialogue should proceed in terms of people of other faiths and ideologies rather than of theoretical, impersonal systems. This is not to deny the importance of religious traditions and their inter-relationships but it is vital to examine how faiths and ideologies have given direction to the daily living of individuals and groups and actually affect dialogue on both sides.

Approaching the theological questions in this spirit Christians should proceed...

- with repentance, because they know how easily they misconstrue God's revelation in Jesus Christ, betraying it in their actions and posturing as the owners of God's truth rather than, as in fact they are, the undeserving recipients of grace;
- with humility, because they so often perceive in people of other faiths and ideologies a spirituality, dedication, compassion and a wisdom which should forbid them making judgements about others as though from a position of superiority; in particular they should avoid using ideas such as "anonymous Christians", "the Christian presence", "the unknown Christ", in ways not intended by those who proposed them for theological purposes or in ways prejudicial to the self-understanding of Christians and others;
- with joy, because it is not themselves they preach; it is Jesus Christ, perceived by many people of living faiths and ideologies as prophet, holy one, teacher, example, but confessed by Christians as Lord and Saviour, Himself the faithful witness and the coming one (Rev. 1:5-7);
- with integrity, because they do not enter into dialogue with others

except in this penitent and humble joyfulness in the Lord Jesus Christ, making clear to others their own experience and witness, even as they seek to hear from others their expressions of deepest conviction and insight. All these would mean an openness and exposure, the capacity to be wounded which we see in the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and which we sum up in the word vulnerability.

(Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, pp. 11-12)

11. The attitude of the churches to the ongoing revivals or reassertions of institutional religions will have to vary according to the specific situation. In some countries the situation of the churches has become extremely difficult, particularly where the revival has led to erosion of civil liberties including, in some cases, the freedom of religion.

The prayer of the worldwide church must be that the Christians in those situations may find strength in the Holy Spirit to witness for the kingdom of God in humility and endurance, that oppression can be met with love and that God may use their sufferings to bring about a renewal of their own Christian faith.

We express our solidarity with them as with all oppressed people.

In all situations of religious conflicts the churches are called upon to help their individual members to re-examine their own basic loyalties and to understand better their neighbours of other faiths. On all accounts, the churches must try to find meeting points in their contexts for dialogue and co-operation with people of other faiths. The above-mentioned criteria as well as the common cultural heritage and a commitment to national unity and development could be the starting points for a mutual witness in dialogue. This presupposes a mind of openness, respect and truthfulness in the churches and among their members towards neighbours of other faiths but also courage to give an account of the hope we have in Jesus Christ as our Lord.

As has been pointed out in the Guidelines on Dialogue, received by the Central Committee of the WCC, Jamaica 1979, a dialogical approach to neighbours of other faiths and convictions is not in contradiction with mission. Our mission to witness to Jesus Christ can never be given up. The proclamation of the Gospel to the whole world remains an urgent obligation for all Christians and it should be carried out in the spirit of our Lord, not in a crusading and aggressive spirit.

“Let us behave wisely towards those outside our number; let us use the opportunity to the full. Let our conversation be always full of grace and never insipid; let us study how best to talk with each person we meet” (Col. 4:5-6).

(Your Kingdom Come, pp. 187-188).

CASES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

The following cases for study are not intended to be ideal situations or models of mission and evangelism; nor are they intended to make well-rounded theological statements. Rather they are to suggest an experience, a perspective, which will allow an individual or a group to explore the problems and possibilities of mission and evangelism.

Participants should be encouraged to contribute their own stories and experiences around which discussion can take place.

1. Proclaiming the Kingdom of God

At the very heart of the Church's vocation in the world is the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen. Through its internal life of eucharistic worship, thanksgiving. . .through advocacy even to confrontation with the powers that oppress human beings, the churches are trying to fulfill this evangelistic vocation (#6).

An incident which took place recently in a small southern town in the United States serves as a practical example of what it means to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel as a prophetic announcement. The town contained six churches: two white, four black. It had been the tacit agreement for many generations that the two races would worship separately. On the year in question, however, the town council decided to have a community carol service around the town Christmas tree. Being in the open air, it did not contravene the ecclesial agreement, and the ministers met to make the necessary arrangements. As they warmed to their task and their fellowship, one of them made the suggestion that they should follow up this carol service with a joint sunrise celebration the following Easter. After prayerful consideration, and very mindful of the impact it would have on the town, they agreed that this was a direct command from the Holy Spirit which could not be disobeyed. As such, it was the latest *evangel* for the Christians in their churches.

Each minister, therefore, took the following message to her/his people: That Jesus Christ had commanded the churches in the town to celebrate his Resurrection next year in joint worship. There was no word of what ought to be done in the name of justice; nor yet any mention of the culpability of racism which had prevented this happening sooner. These, of course, had been factors in the theological and ethical discussion which led to the ministers' decision. But as the *evangel*, this was now a command. There was a work of obedience to be performed in joyful acceptance of God's New Age.

Each minister also told his/her people, however, that this was not a question of pastoral authoritarianism. Even though this *evangel* was being proclaimed with conviction, the ministers had agreed to be open to the Spirit. Therefore, if any member, after considering the matter in prayer, felt that the ministers were mis-

taken, and that God did *not* wish the churches to worship together, they would be open to correction.

They were not corrected. The service took place in one of the white churches, full to overflowing. There was a breakfast afterwards in one of the black churches, full to overflowing. The people of God were obedient, and the New Age of hope broke into present reality.

QUESTIONS

1. What does this incident have to say to us about the *form* and *content* of our proclamation?
2. Are there any evangelistic principles discernible in the action of these ministers for the proclamation of the Gospel?

2. The Cross . . . Uncovers the Lostness of the World

The cross is the place of the decisive battle between the powers of evil and the love of God. It uncovers the lostness of the world, the magnitude of human sinfulness, the tragedy of human alienation. The total self-surrendering of Christ reveals the immeasurable depth of God's love for the world (#8). (John 3:16)

The following is an excerpt from a letter written by a young American minister serving a pastorate this year just south of the border between Eire and Northern Ireland.

My wife, my son and I woke this morning, and the sun was shining brilliantly in our little corner of Ireland. And you must understand that is a rare and welcome sight. We live amidst mountains and the Shannon River; it really couldn't be more beautiful. Sometimes, after a rain, we are blessed with a rainbow that stretches 180 degrees across the sky. Breathtaking is not an exaggeration.

But then I read in today's paper that three more men were killed in the North when they attempted to run a police barricade, and that brings to eighteen the number of people who have been killed

since we arrived. Three policemen were killed when their car drove over a bomb that had been buried in the road a couple of weeks ago. A man and his female friend were also killed by a bomb just two days ago only thirty miles from where we live. A customs officer and a British soldier were shot and killed. Two young children were blown up by mistake with a bomb planted to kill more British soldiers. And a man who had already lost a brother and a sister-in-law to another brother in the violence had his right hand sawn off above the wrist by three men who claimed he was a terrorist sympathizer.

I don't mean to worry you about our own safety here in the Republic. We are as safe as anyone in an American city is safe from a violent crime. That may or may not be very comforting. But we are here, nonetheless.

I have needed to write to someone about what has been happening here just since we arrived. Seventeen men and one woman have been killed in one terrible way or another in just nine weeks.

When I go to the North for church meetings, I have to go through an army check point, and sometimes just in the middle of nowhere there has been set up a random road check by the army. That is an uncomfortably foreign experience to me. It is not at all like customs. These soldiers are armed with automatic rifles and machine-guns and are dressed in battle fatigues.

Everyone seems to have an opinion about what should be done, from prayer to revolution. I don't know enough about the subtleties of the situation to render any kind of opinion personally, and I won't presume to tell these people what they should or should not do.

But I pray for civility in Ireland. Every day I pray for an end to the murder and the hatred. But, to be brutally honest with you, I don't know if it does any good at all. I just don't know. It doesn't even make me feel any better any more, and I've only been here nine weeks.

The usual condemnation comes from all the various quarters; Catholic bishops, Protestant prelates, politicians, mothers, widows. But the killing goes on with macabre regularity. I am a little closer to the chaos geographically, but I don't know if it is ever understood by virtue of proximity or a distanced perspective. Maybe to really understand the chaos that so disrupts and still controls our lives would make us gods — or maybe just prophets of doom, for if we understood it, could there be any other proclamation than "all is lost," so powerful is the chaos? The sun isn't shining now.

There is great work to be done in the church here, and I only pray that it is God's work that gets done.

QUESTIONS

1. "Evangelism calls people to look towards that Jesus. . . the murdered one on the cross." What is there in the Good News that can speak to the suffering of the innocent ones in this Irish context?
2. Is it possible to preach a gospel of resurrection life in a context such as this? Is it meaningful to proclaim the certainty of the coming kingdom of God in the midst of so much evidence which seems to point to the contrary?
3. What does the witness of this young minister say to us about the servanthood of the evangelist?

3. Communicating the Gospel*

Each person is entitled to hear the Good News. (#10)

The narrator is from Australia.

The Church over the centuries has gone to extraordinary lengths to try to ensure that the Gospel is *heard*.

How, then, can it be that we are not careful to address directly half of those to whom we speak?

As a preacher I always translate the message of the Bible and the Word arising from it so that it specifically speaks to women as well as men. I have been astonished to find that over and over again women come to me and say things like, "If you had asked me before the service whether sexist language mattered, I would have said that it was unimportant. But I want you to know that today I heard the Gospel for the first time, because it was personally addressed to me."

There is no doubt in my mind that women sit in the pews of the churches year after year and fail to hear the Gospel. They listen to

the Word like observers — they appreciate it, but they never claim it as their own. I believe that sexist language — that which excludes women and offers them only a male imagery for God — is a salvation issue. To ignore it is to be careless and half-hearted about the communication of the Gospel.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the statement that "sexist language . . . is a salvation issue."
2. Consider what groups of people are alienated from the Gospel because of the language in our churches; can you suggest ways to become sensitive to this issue?

* From the *International Review of Mission*, July 1980, p. 274.

4. An Encounter with God

While the basic experience of conversion is the same, the awareness of an encounter with God revealed in Christ, the concrete occasion of this experience and the actual shape of the same differ in terms of our personal situation. The calling is to specific changes, to renounce evidences of the domination of sin in our lives and to accept responsibilities in terms of God's love for our neighbor. (#11)

The promise of Jesus Christ to be present when two or three are gathered in his name is often fulfilled with a disconcerting directness. So it was with a group of laypersons who formed a group to discuss the evangelistic outreach of their church in a small midwestern town in the mid-seventies. After several meetings, it became clear that most of the methods had been well tried, and that people belonged to the various churches in the town according to longstanding tradition. There seemed little point in making the rounds for new members one more time.

Then the Spirit of Christ entered into the group through a

simple statement by one of the women. "I don't see how we can be talking about evangelism while there are people starving in the world, and we have \$1,000 in the bank for a new carpet." Those familiar with small church dynamics in the United States will recognize the impact of such a remark. The church was small even by small church standards, having an annual budget of only \$7,200. The minister was part-time, and the members were thus accustomed to handling much of their own day-to-day administration — including this carpet fund, which had accumulated over several years with donations from many past as well as present members.

Once posed, however, the question could not be avoided. Many attempts were made to circumvent it, of course, including the attractive suggestion that a separate fund should be started to raise money for the starving. When this reached \$1,000, it was argued, then the poor could be fed along with the purchase of a new carpet. It was agreed to work along these lines for three months; but when the group re-convened, the status of the carpet fund remained at \$1,000, and the fund for the hungry at zero.

The minister took the initiative at this stage, and called an open church meeting. Quite bluntly he told the gathering that during the past three months, while the carpet fund had stayed in the bank, more than two and a half million human beings had died of hunger. To have allowed this to happen was a sin of terrible dimensions: a social sin and a global sin, in which each member had shared.

As the meeting progressed, a sense of repentance took hold of the congregation, and before long the vote was unanimous to give away the \$1,000 and start the carpet fund again from scratch. It was agreed to send a delegation to the bishop with the check, and as the treasurer wrote it out there was a joy and exuberance difficult to describe and impossible to exaggerate. The \$1,000 went directly to the denominational agency for world hunger, and the carpet fund was replenished within the year.

Afterwards, the action of the church was reported in the denominational newspaper. "The people of the church had been challenged by the presence of the Risen Christ in their midst," the report read, "and they were forced to question their funding priorities." It was further pointed out that if every church in the area had given away a similar proportion of its annual budget (i.e., one-seventh), there would have been an immediate gift to world hunger of \$3,500,000.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss what the participants in this story are being changed *from* and *to*.
2. Do you find similarities between the repentance and joy which they experienced corporately and the expressions of repentance and joy which accompany a personal commitment to Jesus Christ?
3. Does this experience support the statement in the affirmation that the call to conversion, as a call to repentance and obedience, should be addressed to nations, groups, and families as well as individuals?

5. The Gospel to All Realms of Life*

In fulfillment of its vocation, the Church is called to announce Good News in Jesus Christ, forgiveness, hope, a new heaven and a new earth, to denounce powers and principalities, sin and injustice; to console the widows and orphans, healing, restoring the brokenhearted; and to celebrate life in the midst of death. (#16)

On April 13, 1981, the Monday before Easter, five unidentified men, two bearing revolvers and three others masked in handkerchiefs, entered the rectory of Father Godofredo Alingal in the southern Philippines town of Kibawe. A minute later Father Alingal was shot in the heart and killed. The 58-year-old priest had served that parish for thirteen years.

Francisco F. Claver, S.J., the head bishop of the Bukidnon prelate, writes:

If there is anything certain in the many uncertainties that surround the murder of Father Alingal, it is this: He was gunned down because of his unflinching proclamation of the gospel of justice.

And so we ask ourselves: Should we mute a little our own proclamation of that gospel lest we suffer the same fate? Or

should we push on relentlessly, not resting until all murderers and wrongdoers in Bukidnon are meted the sentence of justice that they deserve? Or is there a way of proclaiming and working for justice without taking upon ourselves the role of God's avenging angel? The line between justice and revenge can become very thin, indeed it can reach the vanishing point altogether.

The above questions move us on to another fact: Despite his strong commitment to justice, Father Alingal never advocated violence, the violence that kills, and yet fell victim himself to it. And we ask: Should we avoid violence by any and all means, allow ourselves to be trampled on without so much as a whimper of protest? Or should we take up arms ourselves in justifiable self-defense, turn our rectories and churches, our towns and villages, into out-and-out arsenals? Or is there a way of fighting violence without ourselves going the way of violence? The line between fighting violence and doing violence can also disappear completely. . . .

There is a clear answer indicated, I believe, in the two facts noted above about Father Alingal's death — or better, his life. He was for justice, actively and uncompromisingly. He was also against violence, just as actively, just as uncompromisingly. If he had but reneged on the one, he might be alive today, his enemies not finding any compelling reason to kill him. If he had championed the other, he might not have been defenseless himself before the guns of his assailants. His 'yes' to justice, his 'no' to violence — these are the hard facts of the life of the man whose murdered body was meant to fill the lonely tomb of Kibawe.

Father Alingal's answer, I believe, is a perfect exemplification of the consensus that arose from our last general prelature meeting in February of priests and religious, lay leaders and church workers. At that meeting we faced up to the problem of armed power in Bukidnon and its consequences for ourselves and our people. The consensus was an option for, to put it into a formula, total vulnerability. In effect, it was a rejection of violence as a way of righting wrongs and an affirmation of the prelature's thrust for justice.

From a sheerly human-intellectual, political, ideological point of view, we knew the option made no sense. We saw clearly that by our open disavowal of the violence of both President Marcos' military and the opposition New People's Army, as well as all other armed powers, we were putting ourselves completely at their mercy. Worse, we were inviting, even provoking, the very violence we were rejecting by our insistence on the forceful doing of jus-

tice. And possibly worst of all, we arrived at the option in the clear-eyed conviction that, while we would never be able to bring about full justice in society, we would have to keep striving mightily for it — even unto death.

It does not make sense. Except in the context of a faith that is able to make sense out of the contradictions of the cross and the empty tomb and to accept their implications for human living.

Weakness is our strength, vulnerability our power, death our life. There is mystery here — deep unfathomable. . . .And we see its meaning only in the all-encompassing mystery of Christ's own empty tomb.

Only people of faith can take it. And we must be those people.

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does this story illustrate the four tasks of the Church in the introductory text?
2. Consider the many different forms which violence takes in our world. What attitudes and actions of ours may be contributing to violence? Is that a mission question?

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6. The Eucharist — Missionary Medium*

The celebration of the eucharist is the place for the renewal of the missionary conviction at the heart of every congregation. According to the Apostle Paul, the celebration of the eucharist is in itself a "proclamation of the death of the Lord until he comes" (#21). (I Cor. 11:26)

It was obvious that we had come to the end of the road when Don asked, "Where do we go from here?"

"We walk," Dick replied, as he opened the door of the Land Rover. Darkness overtook us as we started up the trail illumined by a single flashlight. A misty rain fell intermittently and our clothing quickly became damp and then wet from brushing against the waist-high grass that lined the path.

We walked for about forty minutes, slipping and sliding at times, but saying little except for someone's wishing that the moon were full and visible. It was neither. I frankly wondered if we were in any danger. Soon thereafter a barking dog and the sound of human voices shouting greetings made my growing anxiety seem rather foolish. The terrain was increasingly difficult to manage, and Don muttered a thanksgiving when we saw candlelight coming through the doorway of a thatched *choza*.

Stooping to enter what could only be called a hovel, we were welcomed by the Indian family in whose home the service was to be held. I was surprised to see some twelve to fifteen adults who had crowded into the one small room awaiting our arrival. I was struck also by an atmosphere charged with expectancy and jubilation. Most of the participants sat on the dirt floor, though some older children stood around the walls. Two of us — the guests — were invited to sit on a log. We listened first to the introductions, then to the singing, the prayers, and the Bible exposition in Spanish and in K'ekchi. I had never been in that part of Guatemala, nor had I ever participated in a service conducted by and for Indians. The spontaneity, simplicity and warmth of it were profoundly moving. In fact, very few experiences of worship have made such an impact on me as did this single event in the jungles of Central America.

When the last chorus was sung and the final prayer was said, Don and I remained seated, unsure as to what we should do. The women got up and after a brief delay served to us in rustic utensils a meal of tortillas, black beans and coffee. We talked, tried to understand and shared in the fellowship of this Christian family, this *ekklesia*. But, ironically, none of us considered the meal and the fellowship as a part of the worship experience. Missionary work for us was proclamation, hymns, prayers and testimonies, not fellowship and eating. We saw the teaching, the prayers and the hymns as evangelism and worship, and the communal supper as something else.

When I think about that night's experience, I remember it with joy because of the fervent participation of those politically oppressed, socially marginalized and economically exploited

people who came together to declare their "thanksgiving for God's gift in Christ." But I also remember the experience with shame, because we failed to seize the opportunity to witness to the fact of Christ's death and proclaim his resurrection in the meal we shared. For that supper was — or at least could have been — an authentic re-enactment of the Supper of our Lord, and the sharing of the bread (tortillas) and the wine (black coffee) would likely have been a parable more easily grasped and remembered than the series of verbal abstractions which were employed in the missionary's attempt to communicate the gospel.

QUESTIONS

1. Suggest reasons why it didn't occur to the missionaries to consider the fellowship meal an "authentic re-enactment" of our Lord's Supper. Consider the ways in which the missionaries were the ones who were ministered to in this story.
2. Can you think of occasions in the life of your church when it would be appropriate to celebrate the eucharist as a "proclamation of the Lord's death"?
3. Consider how specific practices of the eucharist contribute to or hinder its missionary impact. Can you suggest ways in which the significance of the eucharist as a missionary event is more clearly evident?

*From an article by Alan Neely in *Sharing One Bread, Sharing One Hope*, WCC Mission Series, 1993.

7. The Living Witness of a True Community*

Common witness should be the natural consequence of . . . unity with Christ. . . Witness that dare to be common is a powerful sign of unity coming directly and visibly from Christ and is a glimpse of his kingdom. (#23, 24)

The narrator of this story is a citizen of Ghana.

The impressive buildings of the medical mission, on the outskirts of the town, were well-known to us in my family, even if from a distance. People who had received treatment there told us how kind the white sisters were who had welcomed them. Quietly and lovingly these sisters spent most of their time in the hospital, only rarely going into town to do some shopping, dressed always in their habit, evocative of the foreign religion. I myself was living with my family in another district altogether. I had my work, my family, my free time and very few contacts in the mixed society of my country.

Then everything happened very quickly. My wife fell ill and had to be taken to the hospital run by the sisters. One day one of the sisters, to whom my wife liked especially to talk, asked her directly: "Do you think we could manage to live together?" Seeing the surprise on my wife's face, the sister explained that three of them wanted to really share the daily life of the country to which they had been sent. What better way of doing this than by sharing the everyday life of a family! My wife put me in the picture, and since she was still unwell, I found myself thinking that the presence of other women at home might help her a lot when my wife returned from hospital. So we found more spacious lodging and moved in.

What a strange adventure! A more incongruous association could not be imagined: three single western women, all Christians, and a couple with their children who had always lived in accordance with the customs of their own people. The sisters had to make the greater effort: they abandoned their habit and assumed the style of dress of our women; they adopted our food and our way of life; their days became the same as ours, except for the first hour in the morning and the last hour of the evening, when we could hear them singing and praying aloud in their room. When we asked them about this, they told us that these two hours were the most important of the day, and that they were ready to share them with us like everything else.

It was not long before our group grew. We were joined by a teacher, an interpreter, a midwife and two young women who were working to become nuns. Altogether we represented five different cultures, yet from one and the same community, the One whom the sisters celebrate is the strong invisible link. They say that our strange association has brought them to a much deeper understanding of the faith they have professed for so long.

Constituting together, as we do, the living witness of a true com-

munity, we are able to be a meeting place and forum for friendly cooperation between the too-numerous churches in the area. The diaconia of the sisters is jointly supported by the Catholic parishes and the Methodist and Presbyterian congregations. The people are surprised at what has happened, because ancient barriers have been broken down and preference given to practical service to others. We now have a community in the service of all.

QUESTIONS

1. What actions and attitudes on the part of the sisters enabled this community witness to "happen"?
2. Discuss the ways in which the people involved in this community were changed by it. How were the churches affected? The community?
3. Do you know of situations where the witness has been more effective because it is a "common" witness.?

*From *Common Witness*, a study document of the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, p. 31.

8. Rediscovering the Cross*

Mission calls for a serving church in every land, a church which is willing to be marked with the stigmata (nailmarks) of the crucified and risen Lord. (#30)

The narrator is from the German Democratic Republic.

The language of the cross may be foolishness to those who are not on the way to salvation, but for those of us who are on the way, it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18).

For the Christians in our country the cross had lost the power of God. Our churches were too well off and our cross had slowly become a cross covered with gold. Many huge, splendid churches

were built. Our emperors and kings were Christians. The meetings of our parliaments were opened with prayers. Worship services were held in our schools, and instruction in Christian faith was given. And because of all this, everyone was naturally a Christian. People lived better and received more respect if they were Christians. The church had privileges which no one else had.

Now all that has changed. The Christians are becoming a minority in our country. Our parishes are becoming poorer, both in money and in personnel. Our church buildings are deteriorating and have to be closed. Whoever is a Christian has a more difficult time in public life than non-Christians do. It can happen that Christians are not admitted to university studies, or that they are not allowed to enter certain professions. It can happen that Christians do not advance if they confess their faith. For us, faith carries a price. All of a sudden we have rediscovered the cross!

Christ is a poor master — why should we be rich?

Christ depended only on his love for people — why should we depend on prestige and big churches and lots of church employees?

Christ hung powerless on the cross — why should we have power and bring fear to others?

Christ had to suffer among the people — why shouldn't we suffer with him?

This is all very new for us. We have been a church without privileges only for the last 38 years, after having been a state church for the previous 450 years since the Reformation. We have to learn all over again how to be disciples of Christ. But where we are learning that, we are also learning that the cross is a strength — is, in fact, the "power of God" (v. 18). We had forgotten that it is Christ who leads and supports our lives. Now we are learning this again.

I want to tell you about some of the ways in which we are newly experiencing the cross as the power of God. My first example: Before all this change in our church, if Paul had asked in our parishes "Where are the wise people?," everybody would have raised their hand. Nothing but wise people! Nobody there but intelligent, educated people! The doctor, the teacher, the pharmacist, the mayor — of course, they all belonged to the church. Not any more! Instead, our church is becoming a church of the "foolish people" again (v. 27).

Three weeks ago I visited a pastor in a small village in a very ugly area in our regional church. The village is surrounded by soft-coal

strip mines and chemical factories. Few trees are able to grow there, and the air is very bad. There are 350 Christians there, and of that number 10 to 15 people come to worship services. But this pastor had just spent a weekend with a group of 30 young people, all of whom were industrial workers or miners. The group included several divorced people, some people with prison records and four physically handicapped people in wheelchairs. They had all read the Bible together and planned a worship service. In spite of all this, the pastor was unhappy. She said, "Very few of them belong to the church. Most of them aren't baptized. They don't make any contribution to the church. It just isn't a real church congregation." "Yes it is," I said. "It is a real congregation. Those who seem foolish to the world are the people God has chosen (v. 27)! These are the people Christ gathered around him." Yes, these are the people whom God is gathering again in our country!

My second example: The cross is the power of God. "The weakness of God is stronger than the strength of people (v. 25)!" In the weakness of human persons we are discovering again the strength of the cross. This is to say, we are discovering the "charismata," the gifts or talents, with which God has provided human persons. For many years our parishes used only the talents of their pastors, plus maybe the talents of their music directors. The people of God were asleep. Those persons can peacefully stay asleep who understand Christ as the rich king who sits on his throne. The king will take care of things. But those who see Christ on the cross know; this Christ is someone who needs help! We have discovered that Christ needs help, and that we are able to help him with our weak strength, because God sanctifies our weakness. Even our own crosses can become a power of God.

When I get home again, I am going to travel to a sort of convent which belongs to a Protestant sisterhood. I will take my family along. I do this every year, sometimes once a year, sometimes more often, whenever I need quiet and nourishment. This convent has room for 60 guests, but it is always overfilled. There may be more than 100 people there. Only a third of those who would like to go there can be accepted. Several thousands must be turned away each year.

The countryside around this house is not especially attractive, and its accommodations are very simple. But the Bible is read and preached there — every day. And every day Holy Communion is celebrated. Sins are forgiven there and people are refreshed and comforted. And — miracles happen there, all different kinds of

miracles! Some of them seem quite ordinary; everyone is accepted there just as they are. No one is received with prejudice. Whether you are a Christian or not, whether you are a Lutheran, a Catholic or a Baptist, whether you are a drunkard or a bishop — everyone is received with the same love. And you are not disturbed! The house offers many activities: worship services, Bible studies, lectures and counseling, but whether or not you participate is left up to you. Actually, these are great miracles, and not just ordinary ones. But other things also happen: sick people become healthy, sad people become happy, sometimes God is praised in tongues, alcoholics and addicts are healed, people with hard lives learn to be patient and to bear their fates. But there are no saints in this house; there is only a community of weak — sometimes very weak and inadequate — sisters and brothers, who have committed themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ and his cross. But for them and the guests of this house, the cross has become the power of God.

This is what I wanted to tell you. And I wanted to ask you to remember us Christians in the German Democratic Republic, far away across the ocean, and to pray that we hold fast to this cross, so that it remains God's power for us. In the same way, we shall pray for you, for it is this cross which unites you and us.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the lessons which the churches are learning in their minority situation.
2. The affirmation text uses the phrase "power of powerlessness." How does this story help us understand that phrase?
3. Is it possible for a rich, majority church to be a serving church?

*From the *International Review of Mission*, January 1981, pp. 5-7.

9. Crusading Mind or Crucified Mind?*

An imperialistic crusader's spirit was foreign to him. Churches are free to choose the ways they consider best to announce the Gospel to different people in different circumstances. But these options are never neutral. (#28)

Christianity has been busy planning mission strategy — this campaign and that crusade. People have become the object of evangelism since it is understood by Christians that people are 'automatically' living in darkness, untrustworthy, wicked, adulterous and unsaved, while the believers are 'automatically' living in the light, trustworthy, good, not lustful, and saved. The 'teacher complex' expresses itself in a 'crusade complex.' What a comfortable arrangement for the believers! What an irresponsible and easy-going theology!

Often this one-way set-up has been justified by simply quoting the Great Commission of the Risen Lord: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). I do not understand this powerful sentence as an authorization for 'one-way traffic.' I believe it calls for 'Christ-like going.' Take note that it says not just 'go' but 'go, therefore,' that is to say, go on the basis of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, his love, his self-denial, his hope, his death, his resurrection. Only so are we to make disciples of all nations. 'Christ-like going' is not 'one-way traffic.' It is intensely two ways. And in this two-way traffic situation with his people, he gave up his right of way! 'The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Matt. 20:28).

The amazing thing — how utterly amazing — is that it is only in this way of giving up himself that Christ came to us. In his self-denial he came to us. In his dying for us he came to us. This is the heart of the gospel. With the realization of this truth the apostolic faith began. Meditation on the crucified Lord — this is the theme of Christian spirituality and Christian mission.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the ways in which some mission strategies make objects of people.

2. What is the mission methodology suggested by the phrase 'Christ-like going'? How does it differ from a crusade or campaign methodology?

*Adapted from *Three Mile an Hour God* by Kosuke Koyama, published by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1980. Used by permission.

10. Jesus Means What He Says . . .

But the consciousness of the global nature of poverty and exploitation in the world today, the knowledge of the interdependence between nations and the understanding of the international missionary responsibility of the Church — all invite, in fact oblige, every church and every Christian to think of ways and means to share the Good News with the poor of today. (#33)

The following is the recent testimony of a corporate lawyer, active as a layman in his church in suburban U.S.A.

The one thought which amazes me right now is why on earth it took me so long to realize that what Jesus says in the gospels means exactly what it says. I cannot fathom why those of us in the affluent churches of this country have spent so long finding ways of making such plain and simple words mean something different. But I do know that from now on my Christian discipleship must take a different direction.

At first, when the gospel was presented to me as having political and economic meaning, I was angered and alienated. My discipleship was an intensely personal walk with Christ, helping me to cope with day-to-day living, but in no way connected with social structures or human history. I suppose I was alienated from the world and did not know it; it was natural that I should resent being told that I had to live out a gospel which questioned so many of the things I had assumed were unchangeable.

But I will say this. I did try to follow Christ consistently. I accepted that in Christ I had a personal Savior, who received me with all my faults, and to whom I owed allegiance and obedience.

So even when I had to wrestle with this whole new dimension to my faith, I was still trusting in Christ to guide me. I still knew that, whatever I was being led to do in the future, I would have the same assurance and guidance I had always had. And this was what finally convinced me that I had to expand my discipleship to a whole new range of activities. It wasn't anyone's argument — no dramatic sermons, no intensive experiences, just a persistent following of Christ through to something new.

And here I am. I know now that when Jesus tells us to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and visit those in prison, it means exactly that. I know now that my neighbor is truly every human being on the face of this planet. But I know it only because of grace, because I have stayed faithful to Christ and not resisted his will for me.

We are going to start a new group in our church. We will start to put our time and our money to good use. We will meet together for mutual support and guidance, because this work will not prevail unless we ourselves are receiving the grace that can come only from Christ. Our good works are not works of merit, but works of obedience, of obligation as disciples of Jesus Christ. We are not working to *earn* our salvation. We are working to *keep* it!

QUESTIONS

1. From this personal testimony, would you say that this lawyer has had a conversion experience?
2. Clearly, this man is not new to the Christian faith. How would you answer his puzzled question? Why *did* it take him so long to discover the power of the scriptures?
3. In this witness, word and deed come together. Do you discern any progression of cause and effect?
4. Discuss the last two sentences of his statement.

11. "If Anyone Would Come After Me . . ."

For all of us the invitation is clear: to follow Jesus in identification and sharing with the weak, marginalized and poor of the world, because in them we encounter him. (#35)

Blanca is a young Mexican woman engaged, like so many other young people outside El Salvador, in solidarity action to alleviate the suffering of the Salvadorean people and help them to achieve their liberation. For her, however, this work is not a duty, but a way of saying 'thank-you' to the poor people of El Salvador who have given her the gift of faith. She tells the story in the following interview.

Q. Blanca, how did you come to be interested in El Salvador and get involved in solidarity work here in Mexico and with a country you don't even know?

A. To answer that question I would have to start some time back and tell you a little of my personal history. I had all my school education in religious schools, in what you might call a hot-house atmosphere. We talked about the poor, certainly, but we thought of them as poor unfortunate people who suffered and lived in poverty. Perhaps we sometimes even considered them oppressed. And it was our duty to comfort them, take the catechism to them, give them some clothes and assistance of that kind.

I did this very willingly, but, gradually, I began to feel worried and ill at ease. I was beginning to be dissatisfied with the kind of religion I was practicing. Then, with this religious training and these doubts, I went up to university. There the atmosphere was one of testing and rejecting things. I began to abandon many things. Religious rites I found empty and futile. It was a lonely business abandoning so many things like going to church and attending mass that had been important in my life for so long. I realized then that I would have to embark on a solitary quest, though I had very few pointers to help me find the way.

Q. What happened when you set out on this new path?

A. First, I discovered the faces of the poor, but this time I met the real poor. This was a tremendous discovery for me and it made me want to help them in a different way. I began to work with the people who, I think, are the poorest in Mexico, the peasants and the Indians, trying to use my professional skills to help them. But, above all, I would say I began really to understand them, really to grieve for their suffering and rejoice in their successes. That is why I went to Nicaragua to celebrate the first anniversary of the people's triumph. It was like having a seal set on me; I rejoiced in it and

suddenly I seemed to have found a direction. I rejoiced in the triumph of the revolution, but at the same time I rejoiced at having found “something” for my own life. This didn’t alter my religious views at the time. I continued to be estranged from the church and the formal practice of religion because I believed the Church had skirted around the path on which the people and the poor lay wounded and rejected. I had faith and a hope, certainly, but not in God and Jesus Christ. It was a humanistic faith; I thought God possibly existed, but I wasn’t interested in religious faith. I had found “something” important and for me that was enough.

Q. How did you rediscover the faith and discipleship and trust in God you now have and which you say has given new meaning to your life?

A. I’m not sure I can put it into words, but I believe it was an act of grace. Meeting the poor made me see things with new eyes, I think. As Dom Helder Camara says, I was penetrated by the misery of the poor, or so at least I hope and believe. For me the encounter with these very poor Christian communities, with the preachers of the word, and above all the encounter, even though from a distance with the poor Christian people of El Salvador, with the strength and spirit they have shown throughout their persecution, with Monseigneur Romero and his homilies and the goodness and courage with which he defended the poor, was a new experience – not totally new, perhaps, but with a depth and intensity that was new to me. I discovered the spirit of the poor. Then, all at once, in a kind of revelation, I heard and saw a new way of being a Church and being a people, not as two separate things. This had a tremendous impact on me. The poor, with their suffering, their hope and their faith, taught me the ways of God. From then on, I think I can say, my encounter was not just with “something” but with “someone.” With God the Father, the Son who suffers in the suffering flesh of the poor people of El Salvador, the Spirit who moves in us to make all things new.

Q. What does this meeting with God mean to you?

A. Something very profound, but at the same time, I believe, very simple. I would say now I have found my compass; I have the Gospel to guide me. Like all human beings I think I have to go on searching, but I know now that everything leads me to God and

the poor. For someone like me who has gone through so many religious experiences and crises, the most precious thing has been meeting God and finding that He is a God who does not cut me off from the poor, but sends me back to them determined and strengthened in spirit. In all my searching, which I know will continue, I now have clear lines to follow. Before, I thought God was perhaps an invention of my own, something I had thought up in my own head, but now I know He is real. It has been a joy to discover this, and now I want to put the implications of this discovery into practice in my life and give as much as I can of what I am.

I am more conscious of sin now than I used to be. The sin of society which bears down on the poor and destroys them, other people's sin, my own sin. They are like bruises on my soul. But I am not downhearted. Nor do I let myself be discouraged by the difficulties, the cost of defending the poor in their search for liberation. Here the cost may not be very much, but in El Salvador, it is very high. But I take great comfort in Jesus' words: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

QUESTIONS

1. Through her discovery of the poor, Blanca renewed her faith in God. What other lessons did she learn through the poor people of Mexico and El Salvador?
2. What are the opportunities for your church to learn from the poor in your city? In your country? In other parts of the world?

12. The Missionary Frontier at the Parish Doorstep*

Everywhere the churches are in missionary situations. Even in countries where the churches have been active for centuries, we see life organized today without reference to Christian values, a growth of secularism understood as the absence of any final meaning. (#37)

One of the often forgotten characteristics of our western consumer societies is that we are also consumers of the message about,

and the tradition surrounding, Christ. Our societies are filled with buildings and structures, institutions and persons that at least are signs of the kingdom. In most European countries, the folk church tradition implies that a vast majority of the population already is marked by the sign of the cross at baptism. But the word of God, baptism and even the Lord's Supper may be regarded as, and function as, consumer goods with little consequence for the lives of individuals and their nations. Belonging to the church does not seem to give to the vast majority of people any direction in their daily struggle, any hope in their despair, any light in their disillusionment. With all our preoccupation with mission and evangelism in, to us, the far corners of the world, we have not seriously asked the question of a re-evangelization of Europe through its historic churches. We have left that to certain "action groups" and "campaigns" which have little or no appreciation of the breadth of the resources needed: the proclamation of the Gospel, education and instruction for service, the inclusion in the kingdom through baptism and the use of the Lord's Supper as the refreshing meal along the way. There is no alternative for a real re-evangelization of our consumer societies, to a renewal in and of the historic churches. It is time to register this on the agenda of the ecumenical and confessional bodies. This is no easy task as Christ has indicated. It is difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom! And rich we are indeed. But the attempt of modern western persons to rely on fuel reserves, with little or no contact with the filling-station, is about to come to an end.

QUESTIONS

1. Identify ways in which the gospel is "packaged" and "sold" as a consumer product.
2. Discuss why the local church must be responsible for the "re-evangelization" of countries considered to be Christian.

* From the *International Review of Mission*, July 1980, p. 307.

13. An Encounter of Commitments*

True witness follows Jesus Christ in respecting and affirming the uniqueness and freedom of others. (#41)

The narrator is from Sri Lanka.

Once I was travelling by train to a town in the eastern part of Sri Lanka which has a large concentration of Muslims. I found myself in the company of three young Muslims. We talked about the cyclone that had a few months before laid waste much of the countryside. My companions were traders. They were surprised to learn that I was a Christian minister. Perhaps they thought a clergyman was not knowledgeable about other subjects; so they started talking about religion.

"There is not much difference between the Bible and the Qur'an," one of them remarked. "Most of the stories you have in the Bible we have also in the Qur'an."

At that point it is tempting for a Christian to protest. But I knew that they were offering not a theological, only a sociological, statement. I registered neither assent nor dissent. I merely smiled.

"There is a lot about Jesus in the Qur'an," the Muslim friend continued. "We consider him as a great prophet."

I warmed up. No organized religious dialogue would offer such natural opportunities for mutual sharing. I told my friends that I had read the Qur'an in translation and had once written a paper on the concept of justice in the Qur'an. I wasn't trying to impress them; I was only offering them the hand of friendship.

They were visibly pleased that I, a non-Muslim, had studied the Qur'an. We talked of Islam, of the revival of Islam and the rise of Islamic states. We discussed the punishments meted out to people in Muslim countries. "Why are these so harsh?" I asked them.

"That's very necessary," one of them said. "Islam wants to bring about a just society and a community of love. These punishments are never given privately. They are always given in public. When you cut off the hand of a thief, it is not so much a punishment as a deterrent. Others will now think twice before embarking on a career of crime. Thus, its aim is to bring about peace and justice in society."

Another friend took over. He related the story of a lady of some standing who had committed an offence. The Prophet had sym-

pathy for her, but he insisted on punishing her because of his total commitment to the goal of a righteous society. "As Christians, are you not committed to the same goal?" he concluded.

So I told them how we had the same emphasis on the primacy of community. I explained to them our understanding of the relationship of the individual with the community. I spoke briefly of the Christian understanding of forgiveness and love — and dwelt on the kind of love that would not count the cost.

My Muslim friends did not at any time assert that their religion was superior to mine. I did not claim that Christianity was superior to Islam. We bore mutual witness, and many in the compartment followed our conversation with interest.

I do not know how we measure witness. But I felt that I had borne witness to the Lord in whom I believe. And I trust that his grace is sufficient for my Muslim friends as it is for me.

QUESTIONS

1. What evidences are there in this account of a willingness to dialogue on the part of the narrator? Discuss how this attitude would manifest itself in your situation.
2. Do you agree with the narrator that he has in fact "borne witness"?

*This appeared in somewhat different form as a CCA *Concerns Series I* booklet (1980) on "Dialogue" by the Rev. Wesley Ariarajah.

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